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# Forest Service News

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FEATURE

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## 245 LAW ENFORCEMENT ON NATIONAL FORESTS NEEDS HELP FROM PUBLIC //

People frequently think of the Forest Service as Smokey Bear putting out fires and charming children; or as campaign-hatted rangers counting trees and comforting wildlife. But Hugh Speight, law enforcement officer for the Pacific Northwest Region of the USDA Forest Service, points out that the Forest Service also has a cop-on-the-beat role that has been expanding.

It has been expanding because more people are using the forests and because the forest is an alluringly remote place for skullduggery, such as wood theft and marijuana growing. Speight said 123 criminal cases that took place in Oregon and Washington National Forests were prosecuted in Fiscal Year 1984, compared in 83 in FY '83.

Criminal activities usually involve financial loss, and last year, claims totaled \$754,487, against \$250,000 the previous year.

All this activity requires a tight investigative organization on each National Forest and the active cooperation of local law enforcement officers.

Fifteen of the 19 National Forests in Oregon and Washington have Special Agents (some cover more than one National Forest). Special Agents develop and turn over investigative information to appropriate federal and state courts. To assist the Special Agents, there are about 50 Law Enforcement Officers who, in addition to their law enforcement duties of

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patrolling the forests and issuing violation notices, perform other jobs as well.

About 900 additional Forest Service employees in the two states are empowered to issue notices of violation, incidental to their regular duties. Vandalism constitutes a continuing problem for which this group is especially watchful.

Jay Goss, Special Agent for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, says firewood theft is a major problem on his forest. He cited one case in which several individuals worked 30 days before being caught, felling two trees per day, hauling it out on a 1-1/2 ton truck and selling it as firewood on local city streets. They netted \$5,250 in that short period.

Two other persons, Goss said, hired 16 others to cut evergreen boughs from a National Forest and adjacent private land. In five weeks, they collected \$25,000 and failed to pay either their crew, the Forest Service, or the private owners.

Goss said that recently, 43 mandatory notices of violation were issued on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and 33 of the persons involved had previous criminal records, including homicide, rape, theft, and drug violations. The 33 persons had 151 previous felony arrests and 45 misdemeanor arrests.

Woodcutting violations are evident throughout the Pacific Northwest but Bruce Kaufman, timber staff officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Baker, Oregon, says commercial woodcutting violations have been especially troublesome on that Forest. Commercial permits are issued both for cleanup and to provide income for unemployed loggers. On that Forest, commercial permits allow removal of up to 50 cords (though more than one permit is possible) and harvest is limited to lodgepole pine.

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Violations involve cutting without a permit, exceeding the permit limit, and cutting restricted species. During February, Kaufman said the La Grande Ranger District alone issued 380 commercial permits. With so many people in the woods, he added, it is no wonder that violations have increased annually since 1970.

Ben Hull, Special Agent for the Wenatchee, Okanogan and Colville National Forests, said the major impact on him is running down timber thefts. Last year he investigated six major cases valued at \$50,000 to \$100,000 each.

Another illegal activity encountered by Bull is the theft of small trees, such as alpine and sub-alpine species, for sale to wholesalers or nurseries. One person operated illegally and undetected for 6 years and during that period removed nursery stock valued at \$500,000.

Marijuana gardens are a continuing problem in National Forests throughout the region. Last year, Speight said, 171 gardens were confiscated by law enforcement officers. As a result, 9,737 plants were destroyed, compared to 7,468 in 1983. The Forest Service provided \$121,273 to local law enforcement forces for this cooperative activity.

Speight said, "The Forest Service is limited in its ability to catch all violators because of the vastness of the forest and the limited number of agents. We must depend on forest visitors to help in reducing illegal activities. Their willingness to report illegal activities is the key to the successful reduction of criminal activities within the National Forest," he concluded.

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